

Daring  
dive

# 100 Ways of BREAKING YOUR NECK

Trapeze  
suspended  
from  
balloons

Skilful  
balancing

Lofty wire  
walking

Living  
cannon ball

Looping the  
loop in an  
automobile



NE HUNDRED ways of breaking your neck are recognized in the amusement profession—that is, 100 ways in which you may risk your neck to earn a living.

Adam Forepaugh, who, perhaps, was closer to his employees than any circus owner except P. T. Barnum, had a saying: "The nearer you come to breaking your neck the more money you'll pay you." The rule still holds good and the inventor of an "act" in which the performer risks his neck commands the biggest price in the amusement world.

Whenever the limit has seemed to have been reached some person appears with a feat more desperate, more dare devil than any before it. Things that thrilled great crowds of spectators five years ago and set them gasping with horror now appear like kindergarten amusements.

The public—which pays the salaries—loves to be horrified. Whether in France, Germany, England, or America, the people who attend circuses are the same. The more daring the act, the more dangerous to the performer, the better the spectators like it.

And here is one strange feature. Circus men and vaudeville managers declare that not one-half of the people who pay to see daring acts ever see them. They avert their faces when the act starts and look back just as it is finished. They get their money's worth by the thrills of horror they feel while waiting to discover whether or not the man still lives or is a mangled mass.

Another peculiarity of the profession is that most of the riskiest acts are invented and performed by persons in other lines of business.

## Upside Downs Pay the Best.

As a rule the higher a person goes, or the faster he goes, the more money he gets—or she gets—for many of the performers of heart stopping acts are women. Also, it pays better to go upside down.

The bicycle and the automobile have been the instruments of the inventors of the latest thrillers. Most of the recent inventions are simply applications of physical laws to mechanical contrivances, but to interest spectators it is necessary that some human being shall place himself or herself in the mechanism. An auto car looping the loop would not attract ten men to a place, but if a man or woman sits inside the car, the place will be crowded.

One of the most wonderful feats of equilibrium was the invention of two Englishmen. They stretched a wire between two high places—the higher the better—and one of them mounted a bicycle, from which was suspended a triangular framework with a bar and a double trapeze suspended from it. The bicycle rider rode out on to the wire while his comrade performed daring feats on the trapeze. The feat, which is unique and which looks more dangerous than almost any, is really almost as easy as rocking in a chair—always considering that the men do not lose their wits or nerve. The common trick of balancing two knives stuck into a cork on a pin point shows how easy the feat is to any one having nerve enough to try it. The act is terrifying to the beholder and especially spectacular, but really little risk to the trained "up aloft" man.

## Little Danger in Rope Walking.

The tight or slack rope performance is always new and a smaller proportion of performers at this line are killed than of bricklayers—yet the crowd stands gaping and admiring the nerve and daring of the man. The higher the performer can go the better the crowd likes it. Blondin's walk across Niagara is still talked about, but there are 100 circus performers in America alone who would walk across Niagara on a tight wire just to save the 5 cents on the drink of whisky on the Canadian side.

Last summer a wire walker attracted much attention by walking a tight wire 100 feet in the air between towers at Coney Island. These men, especially the slack wire performers, are extremely adept in balancing, but there is a man with Ringling's circus, whose act passes almost unnoticed, who, circus men say, does the most dangerous act in the world. He is a head balancer and works on an ordinary trapeze, balancing on his head on the bar while swinging to the greatest possible arc. He is one of the acts which is really extremely perilous, but does not look so.

High diving into shallow tubs of water is another thriller that wins. Men dive 100 feet from ladders into water twenty-four inches deep and escape unharmed, although the proportion of those hurt is greater than in almost any other act.

A good circus story is told of a prominent high diver who announced as a special attraction that he would dive from the Superior street viaduct at Cleveland, O., into the

river. The viaduct is 128 feet above the water. A great crowd gathered to witness the performance. The diver kissed his hands, posed for his photograph, and made a beautiful dive.

The crowd applauded wildly when he reappeared in safety. Just at that moment two small boys, attired only in trousers and shirts, leaped upon the railing and plunged into the river, coming up like turtles and shaking the water from their hair as they started for the bank. They had been doing it all summer.

## Shooting the Chutes on a Bicycle.

A Chicago boy invented some of the most desperate bicycle feats on record. He started riding down the chutes. Then he invented an act which was unique. He built a sloping platform eighty feet high, cut off short forty feet from the ground, with a net at the bottom. He rode his bicycle down this inclined plane until it hit the net and then he plunged forward through space, diving into a shallow basin of water.

The balloon, parachute, and trapeze act is known to all county fair attendants. The feat is without special perils—barring accidents—but the failure of a parachute to open means death. The first performer in this country was a dare devil named Al Tolbert—an Indian who trained Tod Slone to ride racehorses. Tolbert did balloon ascension and parachute jumps, rode standing "Roman races," skeleton wagon races, did a tight rope performance, and entered his running horses in country fair races. A few years ago he proposed to a circus man that he send up two captive balloons, anchor them from 1,000 to 1,500 feet above the earth with a wire between them, and he would do a stunt on the wire.

Nor at that time did he carry life insurance.

## Human Cannon Ball's Slight Risk.

Another act, which has for many years been a standard, is the one in which a woman is fired out of a cannon across the top of a great tent, either catching a trapeze or landing in a net. The charge of powder is, of course, fired after a huge spring has propelled the woman from the cannon.

Circle  
of death

## Whirled from the car to a trapeze

Barring mishaps she is as safe as if in bed—unless she happens to fall "twisted" into the net. If she does she dies.

The net diving of trapeze troupes within the last few years has become one of the features of a circus and it really is one of the most dangerous and spectacular of circus acts. To alight on the neck means death; to alight "flat" is an exhilarating experience. The tricks of turning just before striking the net make the act more spectacular.

The ordinary trapeze performers, working over nets, are in danger only when apparatus breaks or when their nerve or eye fails—and then they can save themselves in the nets.

One of the acts which is declared extremely perilous and which requires nerve, strength, and a wonderful eye was invented by an Iowa doctor, an enthusiastic bicyclist. He worked the act up until now he rides down an incline of 50 degrees 100 feet, runs up a short incline, lifts his wheel, flies through space for forty-five feet, and alights on another incline. The slightest flaw in the wheel, the slightest slip and he will be killed, yet he does the act twice a day all summer.

## New Way of Looping the Loop.

To loop the loop on a bicycle requires steady nerve and a quick eye, for the rider must throw himself and his wheel out of the loop on to another platform which slopes to the ground.

Looping the gap in an automobile is another risk invented by a Parisian woman. The mechanical devices required are ingenious. The auto first rushes down an incline of 50 degrees. Then it is caught by the upward turn of the track and leaps thirty feet through space, upside down, striking the half circular platform on the other side of the gap and rushing to the ground. The act requires no skill and is not particularly dangerous—unless the apparatus breaks—but it is sufficiently terrifying to the beholder and probably to the performer.

Another loop the loopist has gone his rivals one better. He places himself inside a wheel, with arms and legs acting as spokes, and rolls down the incline and around the loop on the inside. Performers are now doing a double loop, turning over twice inside a loop.

Yet another man willing to risk life to better his salary rides a bicycle around the inside of a huge wheel made of palings. The device looks like a big oak with the staves

pulled apart. He rides around and around inside this on a bicycle with his wheel and body standing straight out from the side, held in place by his own terrific speed.

## Shot from Car to Trapeze.

The newest thing in neckbreaking is seen in Paris. Some frenzied performer invented a device which consists of a roller coaster that flies down a steep incline and up a short runway. There the car suddenly stops and the performer, carried on by the impetus of his body, shoots forty feet up into the air and catches a trapeze bar.

But despite all these new life perilling feats circus men declare that the danger is not so great now as in the old days. The abolition of the old spring board and the double and triple somersaults over strings of camels, and elephants, and horses has lowered the circus death rate greatly. That act was a man killer—and the more so because everybody in the circus participated in it.

There are scores of other ways in which the neck may be broken—but these are some of the newest.

The performers themselves do not speak often of the risk. They are like the window washer who was working on the eighteenth story of a skyscraper, and looking into an office saw rows of clerks working over ledgers. He swung himself out on his rope, swung across to the next window, where his partner was working, and remarked:

"Look in there, Bill. Some people will do anything to make a living."